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13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 words) <p>The objective was to develop methods to determine how low-level mixtures of PAHs degrade aerobically in marine sediment systems, in order to determine what rate and extent of biodegradation can be expected in marine sediments under natural and engineered conditions. Patterns of PAH biodegradation were evaluated under various conditions. The relative and absolute losses of mixtures of PAHs under various experimental conditions were compared. Novel methods were developed and validated to synthesize "realistic" model sediments for biodegradation and fate experiments. A number of conclusions can be drawn from experimental results: 1) Even "aged" model samples behave in a less complex way than do field-contaminated samples, but they still provide insight into trends. 2) Mineralization experiments underpredicted extent of attenuation, relative to experiments which track loss of extractable PAH, but they did show degradation potential. 3) Much of extractable PAH loss observed in the laboratory and field is most likely not mineralization, but rather is probably the result of binding and transformation processes. 4) 3-5 ringed PAHs appear sensitive to degree of aeration, but do attenuate impressively under realistic surface conditions (i.e., occasionally aerated by natural processes). 5) Laboratory results should be extrapolated to the field with caution.</p>				
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GRANT #: N00014-98-WX-20172

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GRANT TITLE: Fate of Complex Aromatic Petroleum Hydrocarbons in Marine Sediments: Biological Transformation, Degradation, and Sequestration

AWARD PERIOD: April 1, 1996 - December 31, 1999

OBJECTIVE: The objective was to develop methods to determine the factors that control how low-level mixtures of PAHs degrade aerobically in marine sediment systems, in order to determine what rate and extent of biodegradation can be expected in marine sediments under natural and engineered conditions.

APPROACH: Patterns of PAH biodegradation were evaluated under various conditions. The relative and absolute losses of mixtures of PAHs under various experimental conditions were compared. Novel methods were developed and validated to synthesize "realistic" model sediments for biodegradation and fate experiments. The hydrodynamics of low-cost, low-energy, high capacity bioreactors were examined.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: 1) The capacity of San Diego Bay microbial consortia to degrade or attenuate selected PAHs (phenanthrene, fluoranthene, pyrene, chrysene, and benzo(a)pyrene) in marine sediments was examined using a variety of laboratory techniques. Results suggested that even recalcitrant and sequestered compounds such as benzo(a)pyrene can be affected by microbial activity, but that oxygen availability can be a controlling factor in the patterns of degradation. Clearly, how degradative capacity is examined also has a significant effect upon what is observed. 2) The fate of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon (PAH) mixtures in marine sediments can be difficult to determine due to extraction, analytical and matrix barriers. The purpose of this work unit was to develop and validate methods to kill indigenous microorganisms in marine sediments, to spike the sediments with a mixture of PAHs in a minimally invasive fashion and to age the treated sediments while following the effects of the treatments on the PAHs and several groups of microorganisms. Following gamma irradiation (0.0, 2.5, 3.5 and 5.0 MRad), the sediments were mixed with known amounts of PAHs that had been coated onto fine-grained sand. During the subsequent aging process, levels of extractable PAHs and numbers of microorganisms were monitored. The addition of PAHs to the unirradiated sediment seemed to rapidly induce the degradation of phenanthrene, fluoranthene and pyrene, while these PAHs decreased to a much smaller extent in the irradiated sediments in the 376 days of the experiment. The heavier PAHs, chrysene and benzo(a)pyrene, showed slight decreases in extractable concentrations at all irradiation levels, suggesting PAH sequestration/aging over time. Using the methods described, a library of killed, labelled/spiked marine sediments was generated. 3) Changes in indigenous bacterial populations were monitored in the above experiments. While phenanthrene- and chrysene-degraders were present in the unspiked sediments, and increased during handling, PAH-spiking of non-irradiated sediments led to dramatic increases in their numbers. Phenotypic characterization of isolates able to grow on phenanthrene or chrysene placed them in several genera of marine bacteria: *Vibrio*, *Marinobacter* or *Cycloclasticus*, *Pseudoalteromonas*, *Marinomonas* and *Halomonas*. ***This is the first time marine PAH-degraders have been identified as the latter***

two genera, expanding the diversity of marine bacteria with this ability. Even at the highest irradiation dose (10 Mrad), heterotrophs and endospore-formers reappeared within weeks. However, while bacteria from the unirradiated sediments had the capacity to both grow on and mineralize ¹⁴C-labeled phenanthrene and chrysene, irradiation prevented the reappearance of PAH degraders for up to 4 months, allowing spikes to age onto the sediments, which can be used to model biodegradation, availability and fate in marine sediments. 4) Hydrodynamics and mass transfer characteristics of a three-phase airlift reactor were studied in a rectangular split-vessel reactor and using an air-seawater-marine sediment system. Experiments were conducted for two-phase systems using marine sediments. The presence of fine sediment particles in the system had little effect on hydrodynamic and mass transfer parameters up to 25% loading. The airlift reactor was found to meet the dissolved oxygen demand needed for a contaminated sediment treatment process.

CONCLUSIONS: If intrinsic or enhanced biodegradation of PAHs in marine sediments is to be part of a contaminated sediment management strategy, it is critically important that we determine the degradative potential of native microbial populations. However, translating information about what microbes *can* do (e.g., the behavior of an isolate in a laboratory fed a sole carbon source) to what microbes *will* do in the field (e.g., complex consortia exposed to a trace contaminant in a complex, carbon-rich matrix) is an inexact science. If we are to use these experiments to "predict" attenuation, a number of conclusions can be drawn: 1) Even "aged" model samples behave in a less complex way than do field-contaminated samples, but they still provide insight into trends. 2) Mineralization experiments underpredicted **extent** of attenuation, relative to experiments which track loss of extractable PAH, but they did show degradation **potential**. 3) Much of extractable PAH loss observed in the laboratory and field is most likely not mineralization, but rather is probably the result of binding and transformation processes which are not yet completely understood. 4) 3-5 ringed PAHs appear sensitive to degree of aeration, but do attenuate impressively under realistic surface conditions (i.e., occasionally aerated by natural processes). 5) Laboratory results should be extrapolated to the field with caution.

SIGNIFICANCE: The methodologies for generating well-characterized, labeled model sediments, as well as data on patterns of degradation of PAHs under various experimental conditions, are powerful tools for examining the critical fate, mass balance and bioavailability questions which must be addressed to translate work on what marine microbes *can* do to information about what they *will* do in real systems. In our experiments, significant attenuation of many PAHs was observed under most conditions, but much remained when degradation rates leveled off (in the classic "hockey stick" shaped pattern). All experimental systems that seek to reflect complex natural processes must strike a balance between "realism" and control. Because of choices made to maximize realism in these experiments, it is unclear how much of the PAH losses observed in static samples resulted from original aeration during homogenization, and how much happened anaerobically. While generally anaerobic within millimeters, many marine sediments are periodically aerated, via resuspension, bioturbation, etc. Current advances in observing the benthic interface using time-lapse Sediment Profile Imaging and 2-dimensional oxygen optrodes, as well as observations on porewater dynamics in micro-flow environments make clear just how dynamic surface sediments are, and seriously undermine

the image of a static, buried, anoxic system. Our laboratory results on PAH responses to aeration, combined with ONR-funded work demonstrating anaerobic capacity, as well as biomarker work and field observations of PAH patterns in disturbed vs. quiescent sediments suggest that there is strong evidence that PAH-contaminated sediments will continue to recover long after deposition. Based upon current theory on "irreversible sorption" of contaminants on marine sediments, and experimental results, it is possible that the "hockey stick" pattern observed in these and most other laboratory biodegradation experiments will be repeated indefinitely if sediments are periodically disturbed in situ. A modeling paper addressing this issue, and its implications for the prediction of the ultimate extent of natural attenuation, is being prepared with Prof. Louis Thibideaux of LSU. Further experimental investigation of these issues requires the use of labeled, spiked, aged sediments, such as those developed in this study.

PATENT INFORMATION: None.

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PUBLICATIONS AND ABSTRACTS (for total period of grant):

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13. S E Apitz, E Arias, S A. Clawson and E W. Lin (2000) "Biodegradation of mixed 3-5 ring polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons in marine sediment: importance of aging, microbial pre-exposure and method selection", SETAC 21st Annual National Meeting, Nashville, TN, November 2000 (invited).

14. S E Apitz, E Arias, S A Clawson and E W Lin (2000) "Model Systems to Examine the Fate of mixtures of PAHs in Marine Sediments", Abstracts of the Second International Conference on the Remediation of Chlorinated and Recalcitrant Compounds, Monterey, CA, May 22-25, 2000 (invited).

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20. S E Apitz and L Thibideaux (in prep) "Irreversible sorption, relaxation and "hockey stick" biodegradation - monitoring natural recovery of PAHs in marine sediments".